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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 002324

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [AF](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: UAE ARMED FORCES COS ON IRAN, MISSILE DEFENSE,  
AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. ABU DHABI 2285  
[1](#)B. ABU DHABI 1797  
[1](#)C. ABU DHABI 2129

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: During a June 6 meeting with Ambassador, UAE Armed Forces Chief of Staff Lt. General Hamad Mohamed Thani al-Rumaithy sought broader engagement on the Gulf Security Dialogue, particularly given the escalating tension surrounding Iran. Al-Rumaithy, who requested the meeting, characterized the Iranians as a "stubborn enemy." In a related discussion on a concept for a regional missile defense system, al-Rumaithy shared his views on the Patriot Air and Missile Defense System and the Russians' S-300/400 system, noting his preference for a systems approach to air defense. The Emiratis expect to continue to discussions on the regional air defense concept at the U.S.-UAE Joint Military Commission (JMC) in Washington June 21-22. COS al-Rumaithy and Ambassador also discussed the UAE's proposal to increase its troop presence in Afghanistan with a 1,000-man battle group. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) The Armed Forces COS was accompanied by Major General Saeed al-Rumaithy, UAE General Headquarters Chief of Administration and Manpower, who will be leading the UAE delegation to the second JMC, and Staff Col. Salem al-Ka'abi, Director of the Office of the Chief of Staff. Embassy DATT, USLO Chief, and Political Chief also attended.

Iran: The "Enemy" in the Neighborhood  
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[1](#)3. (S) Armed Forces COS al-Rumaithy agreed with Ambassador that the recent series of high-level visits from Washington have helped enhance U.S.-UAE cooperation and the security dialogue vis--vis Iran. "We believe we are dealing with a very stubborn enemy," he asserted, referring to Iran. (Note: This was the first time we have heard a senior UAEG official refer to Iran as the "enemy," possibly reflecting a sharpening of the Emirati leadership's concerns. End note.) He went on to say, however, that "no one hates war more than the soldiers." On Iran's nuclear program, al-Rumaithy said he "never imagined Iran would have this capability." He added that he was annoyed with Iran's meddling in both Iraqi

and Afghan internal affairs. "They are very active in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, according to our knowledge," he said.

#### Dialogue on an Air Defense Concept

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¶4. (S) In a related discussion on a regional air defense concept, COS al-Rumaithy told Ambassador, "We need to have a new era in our cooperation where we need to be more transparent with each other." Ambassador agreed, adding, "We face common threats."

¶5. (S) The Emiratis expect to continue discussions on the air defense concept at the upcoming JMC. U.S.-UAE talks about regional air defense to date have focused on ratcheting up the U.S.-UAE security dialogue and exploring options for countering Iran's ambitions in the region (ref C). "We frankly would like to implement (a missile air defense arrangement) for the benefit of both countries, regardless of whether there is a crisis in the region," COS al-Rumaithy told Ambassador.

¶6. (S) Ambassador acknowledged the need for GCC states to discuss the concept among themselves "to see how we knit it all together." The discussion turned to the types of air and missile defense systems either already present on the Arabian Peninsula, or that might become part of a future air defense system, including the Patriot Air and Missile Defense System.

COS al-Rumaithy conceded that GCC considerations were the reason "why we are not sure what we are going to say in the JMC." He said the UAE favors some form of air defense system for its strategic assets, but he also made clear that the UAE cannot go it alone. "From a technical point of view, we need the other GCC states to provide deterrence, a retaliation capability, and coordination," he added. COS al-Rumaithy

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referred to the existing GCC fiber optic command and control system, known in Arabic as "Hazam al-Taawun" (belt of cooperation) as a capability that could be used in an air defense systems approach. Ambassador reiterated that the U.S. was interested in having a robust dialogue with both the UAE and the GCC about this concept.

¶7. (S) Specifically on the Patriot system, Embassy DATT reminded the COS that U.S. Army missile defense experts had traveled to the UAE in April to conduct an air defense assessment, and that six new Patriot Advanced Capability-3 emplacement locations had been identified (ref B) that would be used to deter the Iranian missile threat and protect U.S. military interest in the UAE. COS al-Rumaithy briefly noted his country's pursuit of a second air defense system, the Russian S-300 and its follow-on S-400 system, and he did not rule out Patriot. He did, however, underscore the importance of taking a systems view to air defense, including shared early warning, deterrence, command and control, and application of anti-missile technology. "You have to have more than one way to retaliate," he said.

#### More UAE Troops to Afghanistan

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¶8. (S) Ambassador seized the opportunity of the meeting to follow up on Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed's May 17 proposal for a 1,000-man battle group for combat service in Afghanistan. COS al-Rumaithy said the Armed Forces General Headquarters has been working on the proposal for the past three months and that there were still issues to be resolved, including command and control. Ambassador expressed U.S. interest in discussing the concept and offered U.S. cooperation in developing an implementation plan.

¶9. (S) Noting that U.S. Central Command had asked the Embassy to pursue the issue of additional UAE troops in Afghanistan, Ambassador was able to glean the following from COS

al-Rumaithy:

-- UAE could operate under U.S. or NATO-ISAF, and al-Rumaithy indicated they would prefer a US-command relationship due to their 3-year experience alongside us in OEF, but he acknowledged a possibility that they may be willing to operate under NATO-ISAF;

-- UAE would need to assess strategic value of running a "commando school," and the decision would rest with leadership above COS al-Rumaithy;

-- There is political will to get UAE troops battle-hardened. COS al-Rumaithy said the UAE may be a small country, but it will do its best. "Putting soldiers in this environment (Afghanistan) builds good experience," citing his own experience in southern Lebanon in the 1970s.

¶10. (S) The UAE's objective for Afghanistan is to help it become a "normal" country again, COS al-Rumaithy told Ambassador. Unlike Iraq, the average Afghan needs to eat, he continued. "If all of us manage to let the simple Afghan see some changes in his life, he will succeed." By comparison, Iraq has become a "nesting area for terrorists."

Comment:

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¶11. (S) This focus on Iran with Armed Forces COS al-Rumaithy follows UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed's comment to Ambassador June 4 that the Gulf Cooperation Council Foreign Ministers would be reconvening on June 10 in Riyadh to try to develop a common approach for dealing with Iran (ref A). It also follows separate conversations al-Rumaithy and UAE Air Force and Air Defense Commander Major General Mohammed Sweidan al-Gamzi had on June 4 with CENTAF Commander Lieutenant General Gary North, during which the Emiratis sounded similar concerns regarding Iran and suggested the prospect of additional ramp space for U.S. aircraft at their air bases, which we believe is a sign that UAE officials are focusing on the possibility of a military option against Iran.  
SISON